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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAHORE 000132

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PK

SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE ELECTIONS SHOW PARTY IS ADRIFT

REF: Lahore 82

CLASSIFIED BY: Matthew Lowe, Acting Principal Officer, Consulate Lahore, U.S. Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Although the July 8 provincial party elections of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML; also known as the "Q League") strengthened the Chaudhry family control over the PML, a prominent faction of dissidents who boycott the PML polls could damage the national standing of the PML in the long run. Humayun Akhtar Khan, who has led the opposition to the Chaudhrays, explained that the Chaudhrays broke party rules, and as a result Akhtar Khan will form his own Pakistan Muslim League by the end of July. Although PML President Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi told Principal Officer that former president Musharraf had instigated the split, Akhtar Khan denied that Musharraf had influence over the breakaway group. End Summary.

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Faction Boycotts PML Elections
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¶2. (C) In the run-up to the July 8 provincial elections of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML; also known as the "Q League"), a faction led by former Speaker of the National Assembly Hamid Nasar Chattha and former Commerce Minister Humayun Akhtar Khan announced a boycott because, Chattha told the media July 6, the Chaudhry family has committed "gross violation of party rules." He complained that PML leaders Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi and Moonis Elahi have neglected to take other party members into confidence and put their family concerns over party concerns. Prominent politicians Saleem Saif Ullah, Humayun Akhtar Khan and Dr. Tahir Ali Javed joined the press conference at Akhtar Khan's Lahore residence.

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Pervaiz Elahi Nonplussed
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¶3. (C) In a July 7 meeting with Principal Officer, Pervaiz Elahi dismissed the dissenters as insignificant. "What support do they have? They lack any grassroots support," he argued. He contended that Akhtar Khan had acted at the behest of former president and current London resident Pervaiz Musharraf, who he said is "playing games." "[Musharraf] wants a leadership role in the party," Elahi claimed, "but the party does not want him back."

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Chaudhrays Win Big
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¶4. (C) Despite the boycott, a large majority of each province's General Council, the members of which participate in the party elections, supported the Chaudhry-backed provincial presidents, who ran unopposed. Pervaiz Elahi won in Punjab with 93 percent of the General Council votes; Ghous Bux Mahar in Sindh with 93 percent; Amir Muqam in the Northwest Frontier Province with 90 percent; and Jam Mohammad Yousaf in Baluchistan with 93 percent.

Although Akhtar Khan dismissed the election to the press as proof that the party relies solely on Gujrat district in Punjab, Chaudhry backers disputed the claim. Former Punjab Minister of Education Imran Masood, who comes from Gujrat, and former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Makhdoom Khusro Bhaktiar, who comes from Rahim Yar Khan, told poloff in separate July 9 telcons that 40-50 representatives from each district in Punjab appeared at the election. Masood related that so many voters crowded the Chaudhry Lahore residence that he sat outside and got sunstroke.

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PML To Focus on Opposing PPP and PML-N
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¶5. (C) After conducting national elections on July 20, Pervaiz Elahi outlined to PO, the PML will reassert its role as the opposition party. He listed loadshedding (electricity outages), petrol prices, governance and economic distress as the main issues that the party will use to attack the Punjab government, where it leads the opposition in the provincial assembly, and the National Assembly, where it sits uneasily with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in the opposition. He also downplayed the PML's support for a separate South Punjab province, which several PML politicians have promoted. "It will get us votes now, but it is very impractical and will cause many problems in the country," he admitted.

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Will the Real PML Please Stand Up?

¶6. (C) But the Chaudhry family will continue to face a competing PML faction. In a July 9 meeting with poloff, Akhtar Khan said that he would petition the Federal Election Commission to allow him to hold PML elections again because the Chaudhrays violated the procedures stipulated in the 2002 party constitution. "We will form the real PML," he stated. After the Chaudhry-led PML holds its national elections, Akhtar Khan noted, he will announce "the real" PML party, with Chattha as Chairman, former Petroleum and Natural Resources Chairman Salim Saifullah as Secretary General, and former Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri (who skipped the PML elections while vacationing in London) as head of a policy planning body. The leaders of the PML unification bloc (also known as the "forward bloc"), which has supported the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in the Punjab provincial assembly, has also joined Akhtar Khan's side, he clarified. He disclosed that he had recently held a "quiet" dinner in Islamabad, where 27 Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) appeared, though he realized that he could not count on all of them to join his PML. In any case, he surmised, his side will have far more former ministers and MNAs than the Chaudhrays' PML.

¶7. (C) Akhtar Khan denied that Musharraf had pushed him to split from the Chaudhry faction. Although he confessed that he stayed in contact with the former President, he said that he has urged Musharraf to remain in the United Kingdom. In fact, he pointed out, Chief of Army Staff Kayani has appointed a brigadier to ensure that Musharraf stay away from Pakistan. Akhtar Khan acknowledged that the split in the PML will benefit the two major parties, and he expected that a critical vote at the federal or provincial levels could prompt the Chaudhrays to side with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Akhtar Khan faction to go with the PML-N.

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18. (C) Although high-profile politicians and former ministers have supported the dissidents, they lack the grassroots support that the Chaudhrays have managed to cultivate, as indicated by the strong pro-Chaudhry showing in the party elections. But the breakaway faction, which comprises several experienced political thinkers, still poses a threat to a directionless party, which has swerved to cynical anti-U.S. and anti-Musharraf speeches in recent months (reftel). Ultimately, the competing PML parties could set the groundwork for them to ally with the larger parties in the next round of federal elections, with the Chaudhrays going to the PPP and Akhtar Khan with the PML-N. In any case, while the Chaudhrays have demonstrated their continued hold within the party, the latest turmoil in the PML hurts the Chaudhrays political standing and influence in national affairs.

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